

CATHERINE'S EMBASSY TO FLORENCE

The violation of the interdict had, from the outset, been repugnant to the religious instincts of the majority of the Florentines, and, now that Gregory was dead, Catherine persuaded the Signoria to propitiate his successor by revoking their decree for the compulsory celebration of the offices of the Church. " It seems to me that the first streaks of dawn are beginning to come," she wrote to William Flete, " for our Saviour has illumined this people so that they are delivered from the perverse darkness of the offence they committed by having Mass celebrated by force. Now, by the divine grace, they are observing the interdict and beginning to be obedient to their father." ¹ And she wrote at the same time, in a similar strain, to Alessa, who had not accompanied her to Florence : " Have special prayers offered in the monasteries, and tell our prioress to bid all her daughters make special prayer for peace, so that God may have mercy upon us, and that I may not return without it; and for me, her wretched daughter, that God may give me grace to be always a lover and proclaimer of the truth, and to die for that truth." ²

But, in Florence itself, the dissensions were growing daily more intense, and a complete rupture between the Parte Guelfa and the Signoria seemed imminent. As the prospects of peace drew near, the power of the adherents of the Eight decreased, and the captains of the Party waxed more arrogant and vigorous in their admonitions. And in the background, scarcely heard or heeded by either faction, were sounding the ominous rumblings of a coming storm ; the artisans and unemployed of the lowest orders, the *Ciampi*, were exchanging fierce and secret oaths, preparing the general uprising that was to overwhelm the whole city a few weeks later.

The Parte Guelfa was guided by a small group of
fanatical
and overbearing partisans, among whom Lapo da
Castiglionchio,
Bettino Ricasoli, and Piero degli Albizzi were the most
prominent;
they swayed the voting at the meetings where it was
decided to
admonish such or such individuals ; and the
sentences which the

captains, at their instigation, pronounced were
published by night :

¹ Letter 227 (126).

^a Letter 277 (181).